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THE HIGH-PLACES OF PETRA

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Since our discovery of the first, or "Great" High-Place, at Petra on May 3, 1900,¹ various other sanctuaries have been found by visitors to this wonderfully fascinating rock-capital. Thus, on March 4, 1902, Messrs. Libbey and Hoskins found the second, or "Citadel" High-Place,² and in May, 1904, Mr. Forder of Jerusalem discovered the third, or "Triple" High-Place—also independently discovered by Messrs. Hoskins and Myers in November, 1905.³ The publication in 1904 of the first volume of Brünnow and Domaszewski's great work, entitled *Die Provincia Arabia*,⁴ announced the discovery of other new altars and sanctuaries. More recently Drs. Musil, Savignac, and Dalman have visited Petra with a view to examining the sanctuaries there; while in July, 1906, a party of twenty-two professors and missionaries from Mt. Lebanon, traveling by the new Hejâz Railroad, from Damascus to Ma'an (twenty-five miles east of Petra), spent several days in exploring the ruins of the city, and brought back news of the discovery of still other hitherto unexplored sanctuaries.⁵ Altogether, so far as we have been able to learn, not fewer than twenty-three high-places, large and small, are known to exist in or about Petra. To these we were able to add three others, as the result of our recent explorations in May and July, 1907. The newest of all is a high-place discovered by Professor Harvey Porter, Ph.D., on July 30, in that portion of the city known as en-Numêr. It consists of a high platform, a pool, a cistern, and a possible altar, the whole being approached from the city by upward of 300 rock-hewn steps. Of the nineteen sanctuaries which we have personally examined, we have chosen the ten most important to

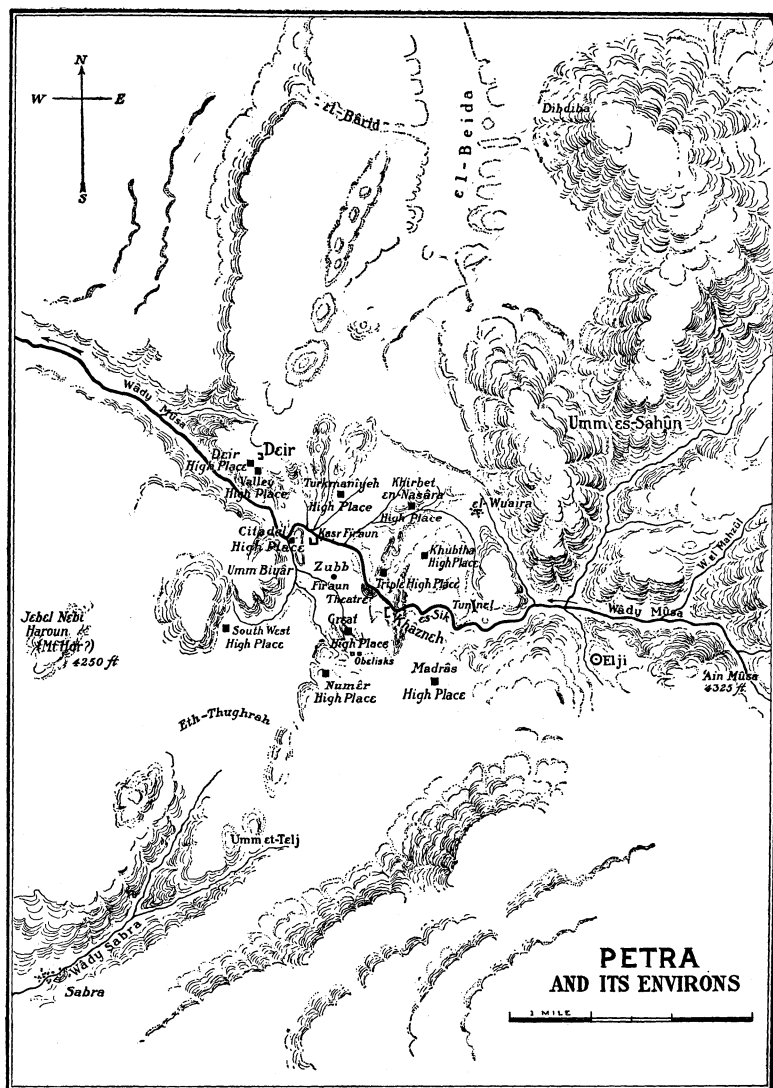
¹ See *Biblical World*, January, 1901, pp. 6-16.

² See *Biblical World*, March, 1903, pp. 167-74.

³ See *Biblical World*, May, 1906, pp. 384-90.

⁴ Published by Trübner, Strassburg, 1 Band, M. 80.

⁵ Messrs. Fox, Irwin, Joy, and Scott were specially designated by the party to search for new high-places.



describe, believing that these ten will furnish all the necessary data from which to make certain important deductions concerning the religious customs and practices of the ancient peoples who once inhabited the land of Edom.

It should be observed, in general, that an ancient Edomite sanctuary was usually situated on some conspicuous elevation where fell the rays of the early morning sun; that numerous rock-hewn stairways led up to it; and that from it a still more sacred shrine, such as the "Deir" or "Aaron's Tomb," was sometimes visible; and further, that a complete high-place consisted of a court or courts, sunken in the mother-rock, usually on the points of the compass, with drain, and seats for the worshipers; also of an altar (or altars), with steps leading up to it from the east, and a passageway about it; and a pool (or pools) of various dimensions, with aqueduct or inlet and drain or outlet; that not infrequently trees are found growing in the near vicinity; and that tombs and tomb-chambers, niches, circles and semicircles, and other rock cuttings are in many instances accompanying features; but that in no case have high-places been found bearing inscriptions. Other accessories of lesser moment will appear in the various drawings; while the relative location of the high-places will be manifest by a glance at the plan of Petra (see Frontispiece).

I. THE GREAT HIGH-PLACE

For location, completeness, and importance, this sanctuary still holds first place among all the high-places as yet discovered at Petra.⁶ It is situated on the top of a very high and prominent mountain peak, called by the Arabs en-Nejr, almost equidistant from the "Theater" and el-Khazne, with an altitude of approximately 3,600 feet. It was approached from four different directions, broad stairways having been cut with great care up the various ravines. Niches for statues or votive offerings adorn the rock-walls along the ways; a small altar stands out conspicuously on a half-way terrace to the west.

⁶ For detailed descriptions of this great high-place see E. L. Wilson, *Century Magazine*, 1885, and *In Scripture Lands*, 1891; S. I. Curtiss, *Quarterly Statement of the Palestine Exploration Fund*, 1900; George L. Robinson, *Biblical World*, January, 1901, and *Mittheilungen und Nachrichten des Deutschen Palaestina Vereins*, 1901; Savignac, *Revue Biblique*, 1903; and Brünnow and Domaszewski, *Die Provincia Arabia*, 1904. For a cut of this high-place see *Biblical World*, Vol. XVII, p. 2.

Two *mazzebahs* or pillars, 100 feet apart, mark the approach from the southeast, the height of the western pillar being 21 feet, 3 inches, that of the eastern, 22 feet, 3 inches. These remind one of the two pillars at the entrance to Solomon's Temple, Jachin and Boaz (I Kings 7:21), and of Jacob's at Bethel (Gen. 28:18 ff.), which may have been considered representations of deity (Hos. 3:4). Between the pillars and the sanctuary stand the ruins of a mediaeval watch tower.

The high-place itself possesses all the features of an Edomite sanctuary, save the semicircles and niches and covered chambers and tombs which are sometimes found in connection with other sanctuaries. On the other hand, it possesses features which are distinctively and characteristically its own. One is impressed with the large deep court which has been cut with such precision into the living rock on the points of the compass; but particularly with the raised platform or slab in its center which may have marked the place where the officiating priest recited prayers, or possibly where the naked priestess stood, as among the Ismaliyeh peoples at Mehardeh near Hamath in North Syria today, who, however, treat her as a medium, not as an object of worship; or, again possibly, as an altar of sacrifice on which the heart of the (human?) victim was taken out. The ledge running about the northern end of the court was, of course, intended as a seat for the worshippers. The rock-hewn steps leading down from the southwestern side of the court may have been intended for the carrying-away of the entrails. In reference to the drain near the southeast corner, it should be noticed that it conducts the rain water, which if allowed to collect would have flooded the court, over the side of the precipice, not into the neighboring pool to the south. The shallow cutting to the north was probably intended for the initiated.

The two altars on the west facing the court were quite probably used for separate purposes. That the square or rectangular altar (9×6 feet) should have been cut out of the solid rock with a passageway all about it is very characteristic. The altars of Pompeii and Baalbek were similarly constructed. As the stairs led up to it from the east, the priest, when standing upon the top step, could look across the city and see Mt. Hor directly before him. Perhaps, as in various parts of Syria and Mount Lebanon today, it was enough

to worship within sight of the chief mountain sanctuary. The top of this square altar has three of its corners cut down as though some artificial parapet or actual horns had once adorned the sacred structure. The depression in its center was doubtless the altar hearth.

The circles on top of the adjoining altar were very probably intended for libations (cf. Exod. 29:12). It has been suggested, however, that they were secondary, and had a female signification. The drain is evidence that the sacrificial blood was probably poured out over the concentric circles. The blood drain of the altar at Baalbek is over 100 feet long. But it is a mistake to think that the blood was conducted into the cavity or pool by the steps, for, in the first place, the drain does not lead into it; second, the cavity has a cuplike depression in its floor like other water pools; and third, the blood of sacrifices would probably not be collected in any case. In Pompeii the blood was burned. The oblong cavity on the eastern side of this round altar, which has been difficult to explain, is clearly another pool for water. There is an outlet or drain to it, bored through the southeast rock boundary, which argues in this direction. Heretofore, we had supposed that it was a depository for the priestly utensils, but the priests probably had few instruments beyond a roasting-pan and a few knives, and these would not be kept in a cavity of this character. The large pool directly south of the court was formerly cemented. Two trees of stunted growth, and yet measuring 2 feet 10 inches in girth, in one instance, are today growing within only a few feet of the sanctuary. Others may be found upon the terraces to the north and east. Standing between the round and square altars, one can see the urn on the top of the Deir. From any part of the sanctuary, Mt. Hor is distinctly visible. While old, it cannot be claimed that this is the most ancient of all the sanctuaries at Petra. But probably it was new not less than 2,000 years ago. There is little doubt that it was the great central sanctuary, or "cathedral," of the city.

II. THE CITADEL HIGH-PLACE

This high-place was discovered by Messrs. Libbey and Hoskins on March 4, 1902.⁷ It is situated on a low terrace behind the Citadel

⁷ For their description see *The Jordan Valley and Petra*, 1905, II, pp. 191-207; also, *Biblical World*, March, 1903, pp. 167-74, where a cut may be found.

Rock, or el-Habis, in the western portion of the city; its altitude being approximately 2,900 feet. It was easily approached by a terrace in two directions, and likewise from the valley below. In many of its main features it resembles the Great High-Place just described. It possesses three rock-hewn courts, cut on the points of the compass, one now filled with earth, and is supplied with drains, and seats for the worshipers, but with no slab or raised platform for the priest. The altar is very uneven and irregular, with no well-defined passage about it. The small pool at the southeast corner of the grass court has a cup-like depression in its floor, in order that the last drop of water might be gathered up.

Closely adjoining this water pool are the remains of what was once probably a roofed-in guest-chamber or hall, in which the sacrificial feast was held (I Sam. 9:22). Such halls were erected by the ancients for various purposes and were called "houses of the high-places" (I Kings 12:31, 13:32; II Kings 23:19). They contained the image of the god worshiped (II Kings 17:29). A niche adorns the south wall. A little to the east, tomb-chambers are found, excavated in the very rock out of which the high-place itself is carved. The close proximity of these is evidence of the mortuary character of the sanctuary. All about in almost every direction are scores of tombs and tomb-chambers. About 200 feet to the southwest in the bottom of the wady may also be found semicircles 12 feet in diameter.

The remaining features of this high-place are comparatively unimportant. The central pool, whose sides are almost completely worn away, has a cup-hole in its bottom which seems to indicate that it was probably once used for water as the original discoverers conjectured. But that the two tiny cup-holes cut in the rock a few feet to the south are "similar to the circular cuttings of the round altar in the Great High-Place" is not so convincing.⁸ Small trees are to be found growing in the near vicinity. This sanctuary has no pillars; and neither the Deir nor Mt. Hor is visible from it. It was probably, therefore, nothing more than a mortuary chapel near which the ancient Nabatheans loved to be buried. The modern Arabs also, around Karyatein, midway between Damascus and Palmyra, have a strong desire to be buried near a shrine. There is also

⁸ Libbey and Hoskins, *The Jordan Valley and Petra*, II, p. 200.

an extensive cemetery just below the summit of Mt. Hor. Such sanctuaries were doubtless frequented for memorial services, and quite possibly the family distributed food to their relatives and friends, as is the custom still in certain parts. Feasting was common at sanctuaries, for the ancients did not separate religion from common life.

III. THE TRIPLE HIGH-PLACE

This large sanctuary was discovered by Mr. Forder of Jerusalem in May, 1904.⁹ It is conspicuously situated high above the so-called Corinthian Tomb on the eastern mountain wall of the city, its altitude being approximately 3,600 feet. Some consider it composed of three separate high-places, but it is better to regard it as one continuous sanctuary made up of a series of shrines. The worshippers may have visited them in rotation.

It was approached by stairways leading up from different ravines; two beginning near the tomb with the Latin inscription, a third near the tomb with the urn, a fourth leading up the ravine north of the Khazne. The numerous courts are of the usual kind with drain and seat accommodations, and cut as usual on the points of the compass. The altars are of various sorts, the northernmost one being rough and unhewn without any distinct passageway about it. To the east of this one, at a distance of 142 feet, stands another, broken, however, and apparently long ago abandoned. By Professor J. Stewart Crawford it is regarded as probably the oldest altar in Petra. But by far the most interesting altar of this sanctuary is that situated at the western end of the most southern court. It stands upright and undetached from the rock boundary of the court, and has a drain from its upper surface. It has been considered a *mazzebah* or pillar, but more probably it was an altar of libation. About 200 yards east of this Triple High-Place may be found an actual pyramid or obelisk cut in the northern wall of a rock-hewn highway, and still another similar to it on the main road to el-Beida.

The distinctively new feature of this high-place is the semicircles or roasting-ovens. These open circles are too small to have been used as sitting-places during the sacrificial meal, but, on the contrary,

⁹ Also independently by Messrs. Hoskins and Myers on November 16, 1905, and by Mr. Hoskins briefly described in *Biblical World*, May, 1906, pp. 385-90.

are just large enough to accommodate a cauldron like those used by the Arabs today on the summit of Mt. Hor. The irregular "cavity" in the court of the northern section may have been intended for the same purpose. This theory is confirmed by the presence of possible tomb-chambers 75 feet east of the southernmost court; though by some these chambers are considered to have been storehouses or magazines; or possibly as quarters for the custodian of the sanctuary. This theory is also substantiated by the presence of a once-roofed-in chamber (southern section) which in other sanctuaries seems always to be associated with mortuary chapels. In any case this high-place ranks among the most important in Petra. It must be quite as old, or even older than the Great High-Place. Mt. Hor is distinctly visible from every portion of it.

IV. THE TURKMANIYEH HIGH-PLACE

This sanctuary was evidently discovered by Domaszewski, who first describes it.¹⁰ It is situated on the western slope of the Turkmaniyeh Valley, not far south of the tomb with the famous Nabathean inscription. Its altitude is approximately 3,200 feet. It has several rock-hewn courts, cut as usual on the points of the compass, and accompanied with tunnel-drains and banks for seats for the worshippers. A colossal altar rock with steps leading up to its summit stands near its principal entrance.

The most striking feature of this sanctuary is the roofed-in chamber, or hall, with broad steps at its entrance, a court with seats about it on three sides, and a stairway leading from the main passage to its roof. Another notable characteristic is the circular cavity between the two grass courts which seems to have been intended as a fire oven, for it resembles very closely the one in actual use by the modern Samaritans of Shechem, when they sacrifice the passover on Mt. Gerizim. It is so situated that water drains away from, rather than into, it. Tombs and tomb-chambers are located in the near vicinity. Trees also grow at no great distance. There are numerous stairways about, and one niche adjacent to the grass court. Mt. Hor is not visible.

¹⁰ See Brünnow, *Die Provincia Arabia*, p. 362.



TURKMANÎYEH HIGH-PLACE

V. THE MADRÂS HIGH-PLACE

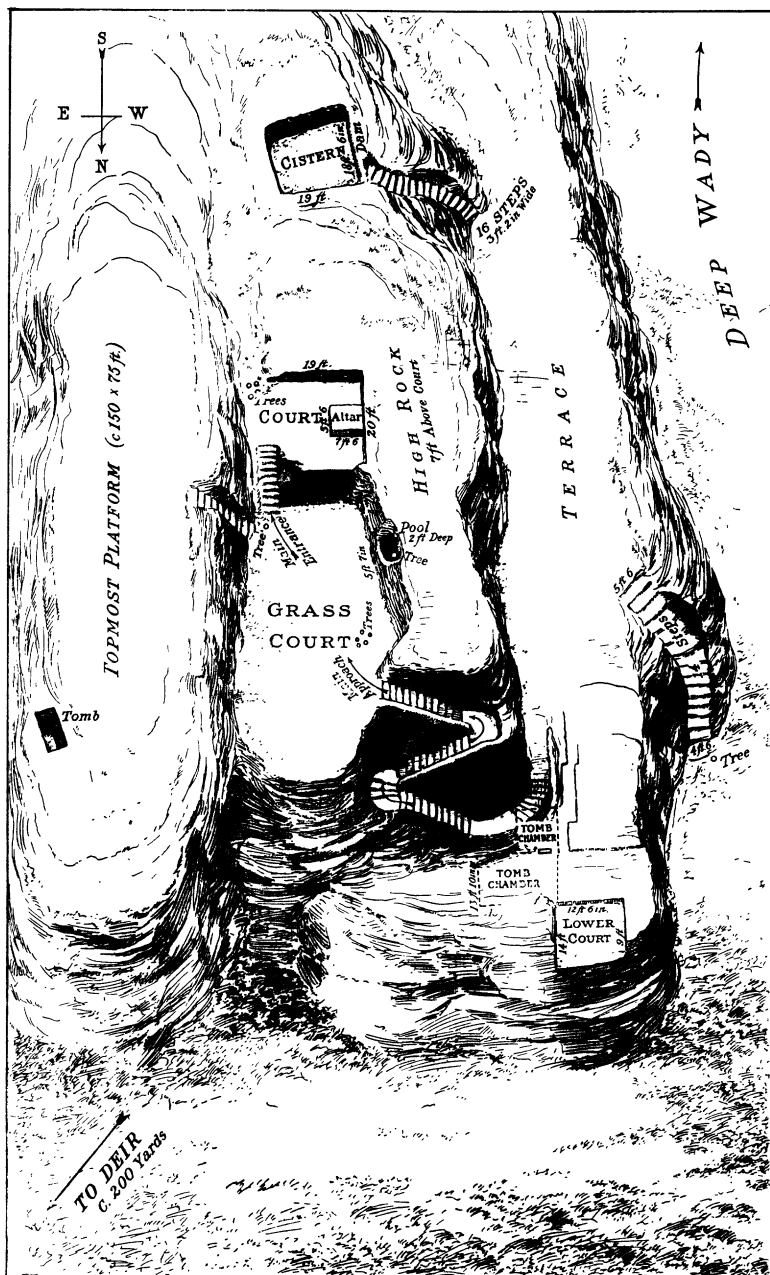
This is one of the most handsomely carved sanctuaries in Petra. It evidently corresponds with Brünnow's *Opferplatz*, numbered "51," but neither he nor Domaszewski gives any description of it whatever. It is situated well outside the city proper, considerably south of the east end of the picturesque Sik. Its name signifies "threshing-floor." A most imposing broad stairway leads up to it over white rocks from Wady Musa. Its altitude is about 3,550 feet. The deep rock court is partly sheltered by overhanging rocks. The rain water falling upon the neighboring rocky ridge is conducted by an aqueduct more than 100 feet long into a double pool. Shallow cuttings and small water tanks abound on all sides. A beautiful grass plot lies to the southeast; beyond which there are several tomb-chambers. The altar seems to be entirely missing; but quite possibly important adjuncts of the sanctuary are to be looked for 100 yards to the north, where courts, niches, pools, tombs, and stairways abound in great numbers. From these, too, Mt. Hor is visible, but not from the high-place proper. Though the altar is wanting, there is every reason to believe that this was once an important *Bamah* or high-place.

VI. THE KHUBTHA HIGH-PLACE

This sanctuary receives its name from the region in which it is located. "Khubtha" signifies treachery and deceit, hence the treacherous and deceitful region. It was the writer's good fortune to have discovered this and the two following high-places yet to be described. It is situated about 500 yards northeast of the third or Triple High-Place, in the eastern portion of the rock plateau which bounds the city. Its altitude is approximately 3,700 feet. The large deep cistern and the correspondingly large but now mutilated guest-chamber are two outstanding features of this sanctuary. Most striking of all, however, are the semicircles which are carved into the upper surfaces of the rock dome. These are so weatherworn as to leave them too shallow for roasting-ovens. They may have been, of course, an altar of libation, but the presence of a tomb in close proximity and of the guest-chamber rather point in the direction of the former supposition. This high-place was, therefore, another mortuary chapel. Mt. Hor is not immediately visible from it.



KHUBTHA HIGH-PLACE



DEIR HIGH-PLACE

VII. THE DEIR HIGH-PLACE

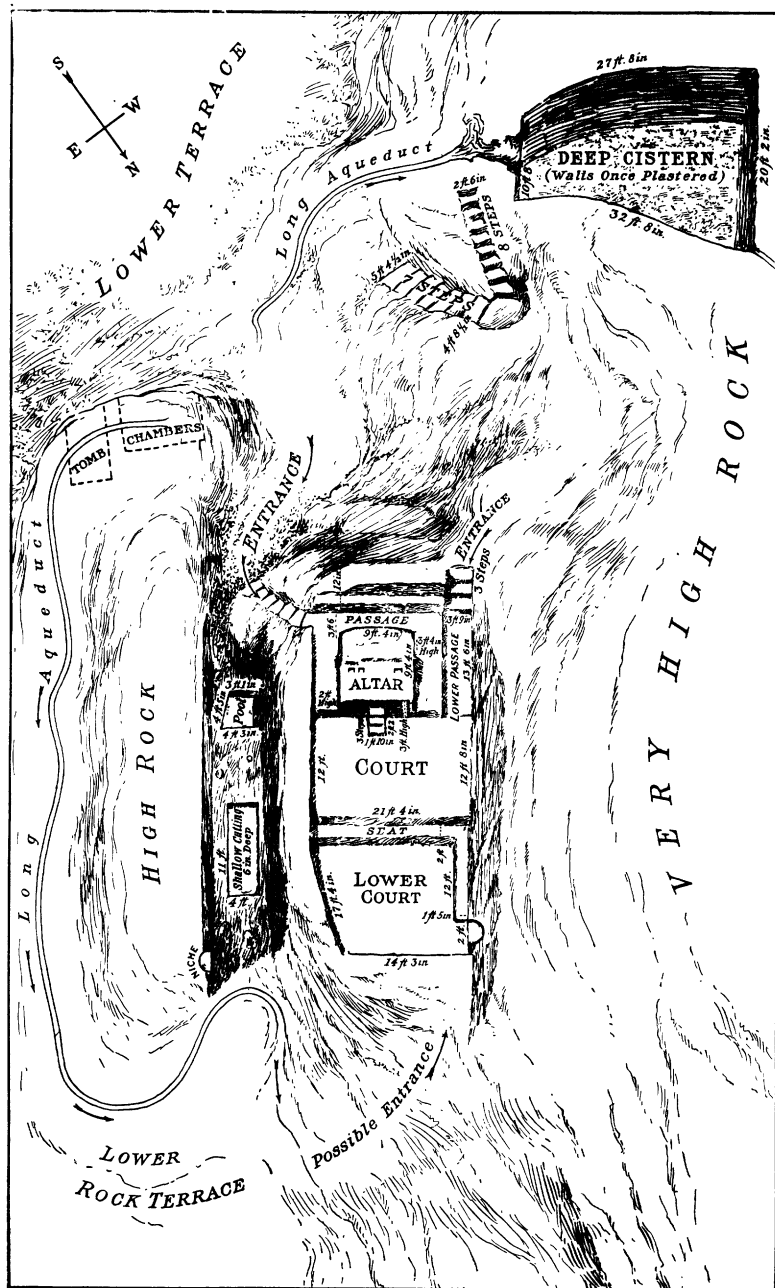
This high-place is one of the most conspicuous and at the same time one of the most secluded of the whole number. It is situated only about 200 yards southwest of the Deir, on a very conspicuous rock promontory, and yet so constructed as not to be visible from any of the surrounding vantage points, not even from the dome of the Deir itself. Its altitude is about 3,700 feet. Its stairways, which rise from one terrace to another, are among the finest in Petra. Excepting the semicircles and guest-chamber it has all the accessories of a mortuary chapel. Mt. Hor is visible from the topmost platform; likewise the Deir.

VIII. THE KHIRBET EN-NASÂRA HIGH-PLACE

This high-place derives its name from the so-called "Christian ruins" in the northern section of the city on whose southeast corner it is located. Its altitude is about 3,200 feet. The most prominent feature of this sanctuary is the large altar which stands on the edge of the upper court, having a broad, well-defined passageway all about it. Those which most closely resemble it are the "Square Altar" of the Great High-Place, and the very ancient altar located a few paces northwest of the Deir, which, like this, stands on an elevated platform. It was doubtless an altar of great antiquity. The steps lead up to it from the northeast. It seems to have been so constructed as to the points of compass that the priest when standing upon the top step of the altar's stairway would face Mt. Hor: yet the mountain itself is not visible.

IX. THE VALLEY HIGH-PLACE

This sanctuary was discovered in July, 1905, by Messrs. Fox, Irwin, Joy, and Scott, members of the teaching staff of the Syrian Protestant College, Beirut. It is situated about 100 yards south of the Deir and about 100 feet west of a deep chasm once spanned by a bridge, traces of whose arches still remain. Its altitude is about 3,375 feet. It is composed of two sections, an eastern and a western, not immediately adjoining but closely related to each other. Neither section has any trace of a clearly defined altar. There are numerous tombs and tomb-chambers in the vicinity of both. The two most



KHIRBET EN-NASÂRA HIGH-PLACE

striking features are the "faucet"-like outlet to the once plastered pool of the "eastern section," and the semicircles cut into the top surface of the rock dome. Very probably, therefore, we here have another mortuary chapel. From this high-place the Deir is visible; Mt. Hor is not.

X. THE SOUTHWEST HIGH-PLACE

The name suggests its situation. Its altitude is approximately 3,100 feet. It corresponds to Brünnow's *Opferaltar*, "311," and *Opferplätze*, "315." It stands close beside the main road which leads from the city toward Mt. Hor. The outstanding feature of this sanctuary is the Great Altar Rock (?). While there is some doubt as to the actual use made of this immense rock boulder, it was evidently considered of great importance by the ancients, as the stairways, niche, and cistern would indicate. The lower portions of the stairways are now broken away. The altar was probably located on the extreme top of the ridge of the boulder's dome. Tombs and tomb-chambers exist on all sides, some being richly carved. Doubtless here again we have a mortuary chapel. Neither Mt. Hor nor the Deir is in view.

In conclusion from what has been portrayed it is evident:

- 1) That of all these ten high-places only one, the Great High-Place, can, strictly speaking, be regarded as a public sanctuary. The others are private chapels associated with the burial of the dead. This indeed is not contrary to oriental custom, for it is common both among Jews and Mohammedans to have local sanctuaries which are convenient of access, and beside them a large central sanctuary at which all the people assemble once a year.

- 2) That though other high-places may still be discovered, as is indeed possible, it is highly probable that their main features have been anticipated in the sanctuaries already known.

- 3) And finally, if it be inquired, to what period do these sanctuaries belong? we may answer, probably to the period of the Nabatheans (300 B. C. to 100 A. D.); but these well-carved sanctuaries probably occupy the sites of shrines far more ancient at which the Edomites may have worshiped.